

SUBJECT: Therapy Dog	NUMBER: 1-35.01
EFFECTIVE DATE:	REVIEW DATE:
NMMLEPSC STANDARDS: None	APPROVED: Sheriff

I. POLICY:

Therapy Dog is a component of the mission of the Valencia County Sheriff's Office is to serve children/citizens who are victims of drug endangerment, physical and sexual abuse through prevention, education and intervention. To accomplish this mission the agency may use the services of a certified therapy dog and handler.

II. DEFINITION

A therapy dog is a dog that is trained to provide affection and comfort to people in hospitals, retirement homes, nursing homes, schools, hospices, disaster areas etc. The dog and their owner work together as a team to improve the lives of other people.

Unlike service dogs, therapy dogs are not legally defined. Therapy dogs undergo and pass valuations according to standards set by national organizations such as the AKC's Canine Good Citizen (CGC) Program and the Alliance of Therapy Dogs. They have been trained as a team with their owner/handler to provide therapeutic comfort or emotional support to people.

The therapy dog is not a service dog, shall not be represented as a service dog and shall not be utilized as one under any circumstances.

III. THERAPY DOG PROGRAM

A. The Valencia County Sheriff's Office operates a therapy dog program utilizing volunteer personnel.

1. The agency may designate a deputy or reserve deputy as a therapy dog handler. This is a volunteer position and the designated handler must provide and maintain the therapy dog at no expense to the agency. The deputy or reserve deputy who assumes the responsibilities of a therapy dog handler must successfully complete the appropriate therapy dog training.
2. The handler has the sole responsibility for the correct stewarding of the therapy dog and must function as the therapy dog's advocate at all times. While performing as a member of the therapy dog team, the handler should not act in a dual capacity, such as a field deputy or child advocate since other duties may conflict with the handler duties if an emergency arises.

3. The utilization of the therapy dog will fall under the Community Response Impact Team (C.R.I.T.) chain of command.

B. Therapy Dog Uses - General uses, but not limited to:

1. Public events
2. Community outreach
3. Critical incident stress debriefing
4. School demonstrations
5. Assist at active traumatic incidents
6. Assist with interview of traumatized victims
7. Grief from loss of loved ones
8. Natural disasters such as fires or floods
9. Home visits
10. Hospitals or disaster triage staging areas
11. Schools involved in traumatic incidents affecting staff and/or students
12. Assist behavioral health personnel with crisis intervention

C. While most of the therapy dog's work will be done within the capacity of the Valencia County Sheriff's Office, the therapy dog team may accompany child victims / witnesses at any of the courthouses in the county when needed. The presence of the therapy dog in any courtroom will be at the discretion of the presiding judge.

D. When use of the therapy dog team is not appropriate:

1. Instance of dog allergies
2. Fear of dogs
3. Possible transmission of zoonotic diseases

E. The therapy dog handler shall obtain permission prior to approaching individuals to ensure the safety of all people and the therapy dog. Separate waiting areas may be utilized to provide an appropriate environment for all parties.

IV. TRAINING

- A. The therapy dog handler shall be required to successfully complete training with their therapy dog prior to be placed into service. The training should be consistent with current industry standards for therapy dogs.
- B. The therapy dog handler shall provide proof of current rabies vaccination, proof of negative fecal, proof of veterinarian examination and completed Health Verification form prior to being placed into service.
- C. The therapy dog team shall be evaluated by a certified therapy dog instructor on a regular basis.

- D. The therapy dog team will conduct regularly scheduled training
- E. Copies of all training, certification and medical records shall be maintained in the Professional Standards Division, which will audit all therapy dog team records to ensure all are current.

V. RIDE ALONG PROGRAM

If the therapy dog handler is not a deputy or reserve deputy, they may participate in the Sheriff's Office Ride-Along program.

VI. EQUIPMENT

- A. The therapy dog handler is responsible for providing the following equipment:
 - 1. Leash
 - 2. Soft harness
 - 3. Prong training collar
 - 4. Soft muzzle
 - 5. Food
 - 6. Appropriate housing for the therapy dog (indoor, outdoor and in a vehicle)

VII. HANDLER SELECTION

- A. A canine to be utilized in a therapy dog capacity must be selected based upon appropriate temperament, medical history, breed type, age, background and any other factors that are deemed suitable for specialized the use in accordance with current industry standards.
- B. The request to utilize a therapy dog and/or be designated as a therapy dog handler must be made to the Sheriff through the chain of command. The request must include a letter of interest and all training and certification documentation. The Sheriff shall review the documentation and either approve or deny the request. The Sheriff's decision shall be kept on file with the Professional Standards Division.
- C. A therapy dog shall not be utilized without the prior written approval of the Sheriff.

VIII. DOG/HANDLER REMOVAL

- A. Complaints regarding the therapy dog team shall be investigated through the normal chain of command with recommendations submitted to the Sheriff through the chain of command.
- B. The Sheriff may rescind therapy dog designation and/or therapy dog handler status at his discretion and at any time.